

## DOWN AND OUT IN MONTE CARLO

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In 1971, four years before arriving broke in Monte Carlo, I'm in my last summer in Bristol at the West of England College of Art, awaiting the outcome of my degree show. The show, a display of what one thinks is the best of one's work from the past three years of fruitless arty struggle, is an embarrassing exposure of one's inadequacies as an artist. I show some indifferent paintings, some decent photographs and short films. One has to write a dissertation on a subject of one's choice, such as middle period Botticelli or Art Nouveaux manhole covers in Salford. I get a special dispensation to write a short story. It's a ghost story about a boy's avoidance of a predatory middle-aged homosexual in the South of France. I am lucky to get a 'pass' degree.

In Bristol, I'm lodging with an older friend called Celia and her two children in a third-floor flat in a Georgian terrace in the heart of Clifton, just around the corner from the Suspension Bridge. Celia is divorced, her ex-husband is a department head at the art school. She has a circle of wayward and eccentric friends suffering a hangover from the indulgences of the 60s. One of these is an artist *manqué* called Stanley. Stanley is about ten years older than me and a drifter, dossing on a floor in a basement of the terrace across from Celia's flat. He is tall, slim, handsome, bi-sexual and with a permanently bemused expression. He's cagey about his past. The little I discover is his father is dead and his mother lives in a seaside bungalow near Hastings in Sussex. His paternal grandfather, Percy, won the 3000-metre steeplechase at the 1924 Paris Olympics, despite losing his shoe on the second lap - hardly Chariots of Fire. Stanley's only paid job has been as an anatomical draughtsman, another, was as a rent boy in London's Piccadilly. At some point, he took a lot of drugs. He has a passion for wildlife and has an extensive knowledge of wildflowers and birds and beasts. Later in life, he will become a

well-respected wildlife painter.

Paradoxically, his bi-sexuality manifests itself by him offering me his girlfriend Angela as a sexual partner. Angela is a pretty girl - a biochemistry student at the University. She is unwilling to take up the offer – as am I. One day, Stanley suggests the three of us go to see his mother near Hastings. There are only two spare bedrooms and he says he doesn't want to upset his prim mother by having Angela sleeping with him . Stanley's manipulations bewilder Angela, but she and I have to share a chaste bed. At dawn the next morning, the three of us go shrimping, walking half-a- mile out to sea, netting the shrimps on the incoming tide. Back in the bungalow we cook and shell dozens of the fiddly decapods and make potted shrimps with nutmeg and clarified butter. We eat them on toast for breakfast.

The early 70s had a fashion for appearing to be bi-sexual, exemplified at its height by the of David Bowie. Stanley attracts a small coterie of these liked-minded bi-sexual wannabes. I, although straight, seem to attract these uncertain wanderers. My appearance may have contributed to the appeal. Celia, as an accomplished seamstress, has run me up an outfit copied from an Yves St Laurent pattern for a man's trousers and blouse. She chooses a cotton cloth in pale blue. I look like Bubbles from the Victorian Pear's Soap advertisement. Celia, who encourages us in this bi-sexual play-acting, insists I go out on public display.

Sometimes, led by Stanley, our little gang of half-a-dozen or so true camp gays and pretend bi-sexuals would go in the evenings to the sole gay club in Bristol - we thought of ourselves as daring. Celia would dress in a more masculine manner than usual and pretend to be dykey, until one night she is uncovered as a phoney and beaten up in a dark corridor by a gang of women.. After this awakening incident, we stop going – even our real gay members of the group. And then, one day

Stanley disappears. No one knows where. He had arrived as an unknown figure, made his mark, and slipped away.

After a while, he is forgotten and we carry on with our lives. I get a job on a small magazine, a Bristol left-wing leaning listings magazine. There are five of us – four are young and still on the dole (the dole was looked upon by ex-art students as a sort of unofficial Art's Council grant). There is Bill, the earnest Trotskyist editor; Brian, the lazy listings editor, and Trevor, the inept advertising chap; I am the pretentiously titled art editor. The fifth is a drunken part-timer called Kevin, a lost soul and an ex-Fleet Street hack who delights in instructing us in the basics of magazine production and writing 'snappy opening pars'. There is a typist who is the 'old lady' of a Hell's Angel. She has bad BO but we are too afraid of her boyfriend to tell her to go and wash.

After a few months, the magazine is taken over by a Londoner called Joe who has had an unexpected windfall from selling his house during the early 70s' property boom. 'Time Out', the London listings magazine, had been launched only four years earlier, and had become an unexpected success. Joe, a dreamer, assumes he can replicate our magazine as Bristol's 'Time Out'. After a year the magazine folds, Joe loses all his money and goes off to train as a long-distance lorry driver. The rest of us are now unemployed. I do what most unemployed ex-art students do, I enrol at Brighton Poly's Department of Educational Studies to do a post-grad in teaching. After a year of teaching practice in several south coast schools of variable quality, I get a job in a state school in rural Kent.

As a form master, I'm allotted a class of thirty-one 12 and 13-year-old boys and girls. We get on well because I'm young - there is only a twelve-year difference in age. In Kent there is no 11+ exam; each child is continuously assessed over two years to see whether they should stay on at the school or go to the local grammar. They are the top class of their year. Tim, the young

assistant music teacher, tells me he has set them to write a song in different historical styles - from madrigals to the blues. He says they are good and ought to be turned into a mini musical. Tim and I suggest this to them, but emphasise that we are the producers only and they have to write the libretto, incorporate the songs, direct and perform, design the set and organize the costumes. With a little persuasion, they agree. After weeks of rehearsing and staying late after school, they put on their version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. The audience is about 100 of their peer group. The headmaster attends and is impressed and suggests they perform it for the whole school; which they do. The local paper even reports of these precocious kids.

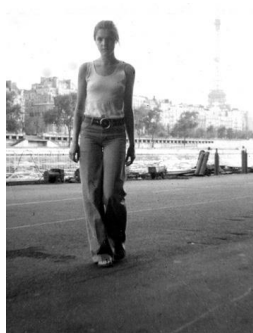
At the end of the year, they all pass the assessment and are to go to the local grammar school. I know I will never again have the luck of having such a group of children. I decide to leave teaching. As I ponder what to do next, I receive a letter post-marked Monaco. It's from Stanley.

The letter is brief. It says that after years of drifting, Stanley has washed up in Monaco – it doesn't say how or why. He says he is painting and has a patron - a wealthy Monegasque lawyer called Michel. Michel has set him up in a studio with another artist, a young Frenchman called Patrick - not Patrice. It appears that Stanley's love and knowledge of nature has borne fruit as he is successfully selling paintings of wild animals. He is living with a girl, a dancer. He says she rescued him from a psychotic period brought on by his class A drug use. The purpose of the letter is to say the lawyer wishes to create a small artists' colony in Monaco. He will pay for materials and studio space, with the artists paying for their living expenses. Stanley is asking if I would like to join him for a trial period. Michel would supply me, for a short time, with somewhere to live. It is too tempting. I reply that after the end of term I shall take up his offer.

On the last day of term, I say goodbye to my class and

return home to my parents near Canterbury. My father is disappointed at my giving up on a profession, but curious of my fetching up in Monaco. He tells me I can claim back most of my year's income tax – all I have to do is tell the government's tax and revenue department I'm permanently leaving the country. Having no savings, this is all I will have to live on.

In mid-July, my girlfriend comes to stay before we set-off for France and Monaco. Angela - for it is she - is now a student at Manchester University; having given up on biochemistry she's now doing history of art.



We train to Dover from the little station near the village and take the ferry to Calais, then to Paris for a couple of days in a cheap hotel in Montmartre, before going down to Avignon. A good friend, Daniel, is on holiday in the south of France and has invited us to stay two nights with him and his friends, the Navans, in their villa in Les Alpilles, near St Remy de Provence. Terry Navan is a novelist

and his wife, Joanna, a travel writer. Their daughter, Olivia, is Dan's girlfriend.

We have arranged to meet Daniel in a bar in the Navan's local village of Mausanne. In summer Les Alpilles is an arid landscape beloved of van Gogh. However, it is known for its annual rainfall quota to descend in one day. It happens that day is today.

Angela and I are in the bar waiting for Daniel when it starts to rain. The locals recognize the signs. They begin, quietly and methodically, to fetch sandbags from a backroom. They carefully lay them on top of each other across the front door.

Within minutes the street outside becomes a river, and then a torrent. The locals silently return to their beers at the bar and to their pastis and card games at the tables - the temperature drops. The rain continues in a ceaseless rush until the whole village is flooded. Then suddenly the rain stops - the clouds disperse, the sun comes out and the heat returns. The village and surrounding landscape begin to steam until the scene becomes a humid mist. Daniel arrives late – he is often late because he gives to whomever he is with his complete attention and forgets the time. He is also absent-minded and has forgotten to tell the Navans we are coming to stay. He takes us to meet the Navans at their hotel bar. And he has forgotten that the Navans have sold their villa and tomorrow are leaving for England. They are not surprised at Daniel's forgetfulness. Terry Navan is a quiet, thoughtful man, on being told of Daniel's mistake and our dilemma, he unexpectedly leaves us. On returning, he tells us he has paid for a room for me and Angela.

Later, I speak to the hotel manager and get a smaller room for two nights for the price of the one paid for by Terry.

Two days later Pamela and I arrive in Monaco We are met at the train station by Stanley and Monica his girlfriend. He is furious because I have failed to warn him that Pamela is with me. Pamela is upset – she is a shy and bright but with little self-confidence. Monica, is dark, tall and slim and pretty - what one would expect of a Monte Carlo dancer. She is civil but unforthcoming.

Stanley has arranged, through Michel, for me to have a flat for a month, after which I will have to shift for myself. The flat is up on the Rock, near the Palace, in a little square with a plashing fountain. It's on the first floor of one of Michel's properties. It's barely furnished – there is a bed but not much else. It's in a grand nineteenth-century house and with no furniture it appears overly spacious. A balcony over-looks the square.



Michel meets us at the flat. He is a Monegasque in his mid-thirties. He is small, quiet, unassuming and charming. He wears black heavy black rimmed spectacles, and is rich: he recently re-decorated his office with the walls ‘papered’ with Swedish suede.

We are taken on a tour of the two studio Michel has provided in Beausoleil, a fifteen minute walk from the Rock. There are two studios, both of which are in Beausoleil, which is the French half of Monaco. If you were in a boat in the harbour and we’re to look back at the familiar curving panorama of Monaco with its nineteenth-century villas and modern high-rise flats – the back-half of that cityscape, sitting beneath the mountainous backdrop, is France. It’s the service area to Monte Carlo – the servants, tradesmen, artisans and suppliers live here. They are the essential workers who keep Monte Carlo going. There is no frontier. One does not know which side of the street is France and which Monaco; one can only tell by the different police uniforms.

One studio is for painting and is in Beausoleil’s old *bains-douche* or public wash-house. It’s down a flight of steps into a basement where a warren of rooms are covered in floor-to-ceiling white tiles. It’s the painting studio and is Stanley’s domain. The other studio is five minutes walk away on the ground floor of an art nouveau apartment building. It’s the lithography studio and is Patrick’s domain. He and his family have an apartment on the first floor. The studio contains an antique stone-lithography press and a collection of thick limestone slabs for the lithographic designs, as well as the usual inks and papers. Off the studio is a small room with a broken-down espresso coffee machine. The only thing that works on it is the steam for frothing coffee, which, if you’re not careful,

gives a small electric shock. I smoke roll-ups, but the French rolling tobacco is the dried-up sweepings from the factory floor. I used the frothing nozzle to steam the tobacco, otherwise it spills out of the cigarette.

After a week Pamela must return to England. I put her on the train to Paris. It is, of course, a sad farewell. Pamela's subsequent letters are a solace - each day anxiously awaited. When one does arrive I delay its opening like a gift on Christmas morning. I go to my local café to read it with a coffee and, if I can afford it, a *pain au chocolat*.

Each morning I walk from the Rock down the hill and along the harbour with its rows of expensive yachts and up a series of long steep and narrow stone staircases to Beausoleil and the litho studio. Behind the harbour is a marketplace which opens at dawn. There they sell a local chickpea flatbread called socca. This is often my breakfast.

Patrick is a master of stone lithography and is to teach me the skill; his English is bad and my French worse, but somehow I'm learning. Stone lithography was invented in Germany in 1796 and is based on the immiscibility of oil and water. The star-wheel press in the studio is one of the oldest extant presses – made in 1810 it should be in a museum.

After about two weeks into the struggle with the intricacies of litho printmaking, Patrick tells me he is leaving Monte Carlo for Mauritius. He says has a commission to design and make a stain-glass window for a church and is to leave with his family within days and doesn't know when he will return. This is a blow. Before leaving he scribbles out in French instructions on the basics of stone lithography from which I will carry-on teaching myself.

And now Michel wants his flat back. He proposes a solution: I can camp in one of the rooms at the old *bains-douche* painting studio. I need, however, some basic equipment such as a camp

bed, a sleeping bag and something to cook on. I have enough money solely for everyday essentials, so I can only buy the bare minimum. Michel says he can provide a camp bed and I have brought a sleeping bag with me. I splash out on a Camping Gaz – a small gas ring, and a milk pan and a frying pan.

It's a wrench to move from the smart, although unfurnished, light-filled apartment on the Rock with its royal neighbours, to a sparsely furnished white-tiled dark and dilapidated basement *bains-douche* in working-class Beausoleil. The studio is windowless except for one window in the front which looks up to the road above. It's where I make my little kitchen. My bedroom, Where I have the company of some cockroaches, is a small cupboard of a room off the kitchen. The rest of the studio is where Stanley paints but I hardly ever see him. As the months go by it becomes more squalid. The sleeping bag especially, and the cockroaches multiply – but they seem harmless.

Each day I work silently in the litho studio teaching myself from Patrick's notes. I begin simply by making single colour black lithographs. Over the months I slowly teach myself coloured lithography using multiple litho stones. The press has a primitive system for creating pressure: you stand on a length of wood like a springboard. When pulling through the prints, one's weight creates the pressure. The autumn is hot and humid. The heat becomes intense. I am a slim young man, but with the lack of money and therefore food, and with the toil of lifting heavy litho stones and the effort using the star-wheel press, I am losing weight. so the prints get lighter and lighter. To counteract this I have to age further and further up towards the end of the springboard which means I'm further and further from the star-wheel, which becomes more and more of a stretch to grab hold of and turn.

I resolve that I'd better start eating more. In my first days away from home at Bristol, after my second disgusting Vesta

chicken curry, I determine I must learn to cook for myself. With the help of Katherine Whitehorn's seminal 'Cooking in a Bed-sit', I teach myself the rudiments. Now, in Monte Carlo, all I have is two pans and a tiny camping Gaz. But over the weeks and months, I manage to improvise all sorts of delicious dishes for one. My *boeuf bourguignon*, to me, is a triumph.

Not knowing anybody, and having little French, means I have few distractions. I get a lot of work done. I'm beginning to master the craft of stone lithography.

One distraction is the local bar around the corner from the litho studio. The Bar Oscar is run by a tiny widow called Madame Angel, who is a Beausoleil institution; she is the mother-hen and confidante to all the locals, whatever their age. Early each morning, surrounded by her customers, she sits erect at her ironing-board in the bar, diligently ironing all that day's freshly washed linen napkins. The bar is frequented by the cleaners, waiters, doormen and cooks from the Monte Carlo hotels - all the people that keep the Principality running smoothly. Beausoleil, is largely populated by Arabs from Algeria whose French is even more difficult to understand. There children, when not at school - which is often - inhabit the bar, mainly to play the pinball machine or *le flipper*. The kids, mostly boys of about 11 and 12, try to beg a franc from me for a game. Initially, I refuse, but having once relented, it turns out to be an investment. They are so skilled at the game, that with my one franc they often win six free games - three of which they donate to me.

Madame Angel has a waiter and general factotum in a pinafore called Pierre, a middle-aged, skinny, morose man from Vietnam. He gracelessly busies himself about the bar all day. Madame bosses him and he obeys like a cowed servant. However, one day, during the August holidays when France closes-down for a month, as does the Bar Oscar - making us regulars homeless and rudderless for four weeks - I glimpse

Pierre strolling in the Place de Casino in a smart cream linen suit and Panama hat, swinging a silver cane like an oriental boulevardier.

My source of entertainment on some evenings is to go to a casino and people watch. The *Casino de Monte Carlo* is out of the question so I go to the casino in the Loewe's Hotel near the harbor. It is free to enter and there is no dress code. The clientele is the more déclassé rich American, not seen in the *Casino de Monte Carlo*. They seem to be mostly businessmen with their wives or mistresses attending a company conference. One night I am admiring a vampish young Jerry Hall lookalike who is winning at blackjack. She's wearing a tight black and white leopard-print dress. Standing in front of me is a middle-aged businessman. He's balding, slightly sweaty and overweight. I comment to him on her good-looks and her good luck. He says: "Yep. My wife always seems to win".

Another form of evening entertainment is gate-crashing private views in the numerous art galleries. Just strolling through the streets one sometimes comes across a party in an art gallery. There is no dress code; the more badly dressed the more plausible you are as an invitee of the exhibiting artist. At a *vernissage* - or private view - in Monaco it is unfashionable to serve wine. The drink of choice is Scotch whisky or, to be very chic, Irish whiskey. I enter, look interestedly at the paintings, drink the freebie whisk(e)y, eat all the canapés, and leave.

During my first month, I hardly see Stanley, he seems to hole-up with his girlfriend in his flat in their large apartment on the waterfront. I presume he is painting his pictures of leopards and tigers there, but I see little evidence. I get a feeling he regrets his invitation to me. Patrick has gone, so the idea of a small artists' colony is redundant. Michel is nowhere to be seen.

Then Stanley announces that he too is leaving Monte Carlo. Monica has been offered an autumn job dancing in Lisbon, and he is to join her. I am now on my own.

Before he departed Patrick had said I could, if desperate, use his old Solex. It's an ancient black moped. The Solex was invented during the war and mass-produced after it, unchanged.. It's driven by a primitive motorised roller clamped onto the front tyre, the friction driving the wheel. However, if it rains there is no friction and nothing happens. Patrick asks me to use it sparingly, and, of course only when the roads are dry. I adhere to the instruction, but once or twice in desperation for a change of scenery, I take the poor old thing up the various Corniches into the mountainous hills behind Monaco for a day out exploring remote villages and churches.

My brother, Michael and his then-wife Mo, arrive for a few days.. They are motoring through France on holiday. They bring with them my old Dansette record player - which is very welcome to break the silence in the studio. A few weeks later, Jonathan, an old friend from art school days arrives, on his way to Florence.

I decide to join Jonathan on his trip to Florence. He has brought a tent with him and I've received some of the monies from my tax rebate. At Monte Carlo station we catch what we think is the train to Florence via Genoa. We should have immediately realized it is the wrong train as it's rather luxurious. The whole train is First Class. We enter a compartment where there is an elegantly dressed woman in her thirties with a girl in her late teens. We settle opposite. The woman, who is Italian and speaks good English, has taken one look at us and knows we are not First Class material (the rolled tent being a give-away). She is very sympathetic and explains our error. There is a danger we will be fined heavily if discovered. The woman and the girl chat and whisper to each in Italian. Occasionally the word 'sexy' is interspersed in the Italian I must explain that Jonathan is very handsome, tall and half- Russian.

The ticket inspector enters. He checks the women's tickets.

When he asks for ours the woman explodes in rage. We are startled at her out of proportion performance. The most startled of all is the ticket inspector. We later learn she is furious with him for being rude to me and Jonathan who are her special guests and that as she is a valued and well-known customer of the train company she will be reporting him. He is flustered, apologises and beats a retreat.

We also learn she is a frequent visitor to Monte Carlo, as her husband is a professional gambler; She is returning to her home in Milan without her husband who remains in Monte Carlo; we explain we are going to Florence, that we are artists and will be camping. She whispers to the girl (who is her au pair and confidante) and then suggests we forego Florence and come and stay with her in Milan. I thank her for her kind offer. I say to Jonathan let's get a coffee - we need to consult with each other.

A natural caution, incline me to turn down the invitation. Jonathan is too modest to realise it is he they are after. I am convinced that it will end badly, with the two of us stranded and broke in Milan. Besides I want to see Florence for the first time. Jonathan reluctantly agrees. Maybe I should regret my lack of adventurousness.

However, in Florence the tent next to ours, in the campsite by the Piazza Michelangelo which overlooks Florence, is occupied by two attractive young German girls. They offer to take us in their camper-van to San Gimignano. I notice that in the San Gimignano Duomo the fresco of the Seven Deadly Sins depicting the consequences of Lust is particularly gruesome. The four of us spend our days together in and around Florence until I have to return to Monte Carlo, and Jonathan to England.

Occasionally I have to go to the bank to get my small tax rebate which is wired to me from my bank in England. The cashier is an attractive young English girl. One evening I'm at

work in the litho studio when she walks in. She says she knew my address from the particulars I had given the bank but she has omitted to take some sort of number from me and is here to rectify the omission. Stanley is there, smirking in the background. I take the girl to Madame Angel's - Monte Carlo experience I'm sure she's never had. She tells me she was working in the bank in Oxford when the opportunity to work in Monaco was offered. She lives alone and knows no one, and invites me to supper. We arrange to meet three days later.

She is an attractive girl and even if nothing comes of it romantically, at least she may be a friend – someone to talk to. She lives about fifteen minutes walk away, which in Monaco is the other side of town. I arrive in the dark at her small apartment clutching a bottle of red. She has prepared a good but simple meal. However, we have nothing in common. I'm sure we both tried, and both wanted the evening to succeed but the atmosphere was simply awkward. I had a feeling she was unhappy in Monte Carlo and that she wouldn't last long. A few weeks later I have to go to the bank. She is not there. I enquire after her and am told she has gone back to Oxford.

I have a rare meeting with Michel. He tells me a consortium of shops and businesses in a shopping centre are in need of a design for a large billboard. Michel asks if I would submit a design. I produce a not very inspired idea but it has a striking graphic of palm trees and a big simple typeface. It's a twenty-foot long billboard so the strong simplicity might work. The consortium is happy with the design. I produce a large template for the poster-printing company and eventually, I see a huge picture of mine gracing the streets of Monaco. And I am paid a decent fee in cash, which I keep in an old tobacco tin under my camp bed.

At the meeting with Michel is a Monegasque friend and associate of his called Hugh. He's about my age and I like him – he is friendly and modest and interested in art. He is well-connected, being a Bellandro de Castro, the 'second family' of

Monaco, after the Grimaldis. He says he has a friend with an art gallery on the Rock. He will ask his friend to have a look at my work. We arranged to meet for a drink.

We meet at Madame Angel's - I suspect a new experience for both of them. Maurice, the art gallery owner is a charming and sympathetic man. He asks to see my work. We go to the litho studio. He is not very *au fait* with stone lithography and is keen to learn more. He offers me an exhibition.. He says he will come back to me with dates.

The date is the last Sunday in November. The gallery is happily called *La Galerie L'Absinthe*. Maurice gives me the usual gallery verbal contract: that he will take 35%; I must pay for the printing of the vernissage invitations and for all framing. For commercial reasons I resolve to do some lithos based on my little collection of old *Belle Époque* photos of Monaco.

Back at the Loewes casino for my evening entertainment I consider a flutter. Roulette is clearly pure chance, but with blackjack, the player has a bit of control. He can watch a game and join in at what he considers to be an opportune moment. He can take note of the cards played, he can make informed guesses. I try a few games of blackjack, and win. I leave it at that and watch a few more games, and the types playing, and then go home.

One evening I get out the tobacco tin to roll a cigarette and I look at the money. There is quite a lot of it. I think that maybe I will try a bit of gambling but under strict self-imposed conditions. In 1975 a pound sterling was worth about ten French francs. I decide I will take a quarter of what I was paid, a decent sum when compared with the cost of living, and, of course, I am still left with three-quarters of my savings. I will go down to the casino and play blackjack. If I double this original amount I will stop playing. As a treat, I go down to the casino on the old Solex.

The Loewes casino is not luxurious or glamorous . It's a big modern open space filled with roulette and blackjack tables. The waitresses are in mini-dresses and the croupiers fascinatingly skilful.

If one is playing at a table, the waitresses offer you free drinks. I'm at a blackjack table so, to keep in the spirit of the occasion, I order a dry Martini. It's nine o'clock. I play cautiously and slowly increase my winnings. About midnight I am more than three-quarters to my goal of doubling my original stake – I've been playing for three hours.

Half an hour later I'm within what I estimate is a couple or three games - about twenty minutes - of achieving my goal. Then I'll cash in my winnings and go home. Despite my caution, what I have gained in nearly four hours, I lose in those twenty minutes. It is annoying.

I get on the Solex and drive home to my dark basement. I can't let them get away with it. I grab a hand full of notes from my tobacco tin and return to the casino.

I settle at a blackjack table and order a dry martini - I keep them coming, after all, they are free. It is now one-thirty in the morning – the casino is open all night. By four a.m. I have lost everything.

I leave the table and wander through the Loewes hotel foyer where there's a row of lift doors. I enter and press the button for the top floor. I find myself alone on the roof. It's a warm night and below me the lights of Monte Carlo shine, as do the cars on the Grande Corniche on the hills behind. There is a large swimming pool. I slip off my shoes and strip naked and dive in. The water is warm but refreshing. After a while, I get out and realise that I'm dripping wet and have no towel. I climb into my clothes which become sodden. I descend in the lift to the foyer where I have to squelch pass the curious guests and staff, wiping water dripping from my face and wet hair. And

climb onto the Solex

It is now about five in the morning and the dawn is emerging as I cruise damply through the empty streets to my windowless basement bedroom. I eventually fall asleep on my camp bed in my well-used sleeping bag amongst the cockroaches.

It's interesting, the ability to be both dispassionate and objective as well as being overwrought and remorseful. It is like being two people in one body, or the pushmi-pullyu creature in Dr Dolittle. One moment I am addressing myself in the third person, that there is no point in crying over spilt milk, the bottle is smashed, you can't put the milk back, but another voice is telling me I'm a fool, why did I behave so stupidly, I used to think of you as a sensible person; if only I could turn the clock back. The pushmi Mr Reasonable is an out of body thing that hovers over you telling you there is nothing you can do about it, so get over it - while the pullu is a Mr Remorseful buried inside, who keeps chiding and scolding. I go to Stanley's apartment - he has given me a key in case of emergencies - and, like a sinner with a stain on his soul, take a shower.

I am now busy organising, with the gallery, my exhibition. Even with my bad French I have to arrange the printing of the invitations and the posters. I give the printers the necessary wording and designs and they send me the proofs. On checking the proofs I notice they have spelt Galerie as Gallerie, which was not in my design. I have to inform the printers of their mistake - a foreigner with bad French explaining to a Frenchman that he cannot spell. I'm also organising the framing which has to be negotiated as it's expensive. When I show them my prints based on the *Belle Epoque* photos of Monaco they are so enamoured of the series of six they offer to waive all fees for the framing if I give them a set of the six. This will save me a lot of money and is tantamount to a first sale.

The exhibition is on the last Sunday in November. We hang the show and it is looking good. The whiskey, wine and canapés are all in place. In Monaco, a vernissage is earlier than in other countries. Maurice, Hugh, Michel, Stanley and I gather at four-thirty to greet the crowds. An hour later nobody has arrived, we check the invitations to make sure I haven't made a mistake with the date and time. Another hour passes and there are a few guests, another hour and still just a smattering. I begin to wonder about Hugh and his important Monegasque connections and Maurice and his influential mailing-list. At eight o'clock we ask the few guests why they are there but not others. 'Oh!', they say, 'don't you know, it's the first day of the ski-ing season - everybody is at the pistes'. My main thought is, that like the skiers it is now downhill all the way, and surely Hugh and Maurice should have known. However, the exhibition is on for another two weeks and by the end, I sell enough lithographs to have made it worthwhile. I spend the next few weeks printing the orders and getting them to the framers or the gallery.

It's now mid-December and time to leave Monaco. I have promised my parents I will be home for Christmas. I book a night train to Paris for the 23<sup>rd</sup>. I finish printing the last of the lithographs. But I have one piece of unfinished business: I need to visit the casino for one more session – I need to literally and metaphorically, get my own back. I take only a small amount of money and if I lose to go back home and forget the desire for revenge.

One evening, three days before I leave, I take the Solex to Loewes. I am not going to play blackjack, with my deluded ideas that one is more in control - I am going to the random chance roulette tables.

The cashier changes my francs into black and white chips. At the roulette table, if one is at a seat the croupier changes one's chips into coloured ones, a different colour for each seat; if one has to stand one plays with the black and white chips. I

have to stand. I begin by ordering a dry martini and then placing a small amount on black. Black comes up. The croupier pushes a pile of my winnings towards me. But there are far too many of them. Clearly, some of them belong to someone else. I look around but nobody is claiming them. I ask the man sitting in front of me if he knows who they belong to, he too looks around, shrugs and tells me I'm lucky and to take them all - which I do - and move off to another table before I'm caught.

There is a free seat, which means my chips are changed into coloured ones, thus immediately hiding any evidence.. I put the extra winnings onto a group of eight numbers. One of the eight comes up and the croupier pushes towards me my winnings. It's substantial. I start to count them. The croupier calls, "faites vos jour". I'm so so busy counting my winnings I've left all of my original stake on the eight numbers. It's too late and the wheel spins, again, one of the eight numbers comes up. And another substantial pile of chips is pushed my way. I retrieve the stake and add-up all my winnings. In these few seconds have won more than I'dlost at blackjack in all those hours. I have fortuitously achieved my revenge. I go straight to the cashier to have them changed into francs. I climb happily onto the Solex and cruise back to the old *bain-douche*. I cram the money into the old tobacco tin, which can hardly take it, and then sleep the sleep of the just. Well, not the just - just lucky.

Three days later, in the evening, I am standing on the platform at Monte Carlo railway station with a small suitcase and a large portfolio. I am alone. I'd said farewell to Stanley the day before - I think he was pleased to see me go - and Michel was too busy to be seen. There are few regrets about leaving Monte Carlo - maybe I'll miss the Bar Oscar and Madame Angel

After a winter's day in Paris, I catch the train to Calais and the night ferry to Dover. It's icy cold when I disembark at Dover docks. The wintry sun is just rising when I catch the train to

Canterbury on the branch line that takes me to the little station near the village where my parents live. As the train travels slowly through the Kent countryside there is a hoar frost. In the pale morning light, the fields and woods have a thin white covering to the tops of the trees. I alight at Bekesbourne station. At that time of the day I'm the only one about, all is still. As I wait in the silence for my father to come to pick me up, I see across the frosty fields the old house where Ian Fleming once lived. I wonder if this is where he wrote of James Bond at the roulette tables in Monte Carlo?

My father arrives and I go home.

\* In 2026 Stanley is now eighty-three years old and a highly regarded wildlife painter.

Robert Tilleard 2020, Tisbury

